

Just because it's written in the stars, doesn't mean it'll last forever by needmesomepie

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: I Made Myself Cry, I am so sorry, M/M, Soulmate AU, and it's a nice way to break your hearts, because i am a sucker for them, no but seriously, sorry lol

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Characters: Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Billy Hargrove & Steve Harrington, Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper

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Summary:

A world of black, of white, of grey. Of forever waiting until that one person steps into your world and brings it quite literally to life. Of unanswered questions and uncertain futures. Of forever wandering until you land in their arms, of wondering if it'll even happen. Of waiting and fighting and hoping for the end you've always dreamed of. Of hidden smiles and public fights. Of familial hate and private acceptance. Of a life you've always wanted and one you never thought would become. Of broken promises and lifetime guarantees. Of love. Of heartbreak. Of hope.

Of forever waiting for what you've been told won't happen, but having a silent wish for anything except what does.

Of forever wishing that you'd never hoped for anything at all.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

HI

lol I'm back and you're probably going to be wishing
I wasn't soon

please don't kill me

The whole idea of a soulmate is bullshit, it just is.

Billy Hargrove had lived his entire life in all shades of black, white and grey, much like everyone else. There were, of course, the lucky few who had never known life without colour, being fortunate enough to have known their soulmates from barely a moment after they were born. And with those also came the unlucky, the less fortunate, the ones who left the world in the same way they came in, never knowing what the sky being blue, the grass being green, the sun being yellow really meant. There were others, the ones who had

met their soulmate, who had discovered a world not all were lucky enough to see. And then there was everyone else, everyone else who was just waiting for the right person to come along and look into their eyes. Waiting for their world to become a circus of colour. And that was where Billy sat.

He'd known about it from a young age, heard whispers of the 'colour world', had met a few people who described the slightly dark grey as 'green' and the slightly lighter grey as 'yellow', knew it was something to do with meeting another person that you spent the rest of your life with. He didn't really understand it for years, constantly living in a simpler world, a world where it didn't matter who you fancied in school, because no one really knew the truth at 6. His mum had spent years telling him what it meant, answering his every question, explaining what a world of colour looked like. He'd enjoyed those years, wished he could go back to them sometimes. But he was 17, he knew what it meant to gain colour into your everyday life, knew he'd be in a world of trouble when his dad found out that no girl was doing that for him. And he wasn't naive enough to live under the illusion that everyone would meet their soulmate. He knew that just because you were destined to be with someone for the rest of your life, it didn't mean you got some magical sense of where it was that you'd find them. He knew that he most likely would never meet the one person who would understand him without question and he tried to not let it bother him, he really did. But the only person who had ever come close to understanding the way that his head worked was his mum and now she was gone and he just, he felt lonely. He wished she was still around, she'd understand, he knew she would. He was half convinced that she knew before he did, always telling him that it didn't matter who he loved and who loved him back, just that he was happy. But she was gone and he only had Neil. Not exactly the support system anyone would jump at the chance of having. And now they were moving. Again. Except this time they were leaving California, and Billy had no idea what that meant for him, or for his chance at colour.

Billy was not looking forward to starting a new school in this shithole of a town, he just wasn't. There were kids running and screaming as he got out of his car, the smell in the air was, quite frankly, appalling and his poor baby was parked next to a bunch of hideously boring metal death traps, if he was being polite about it. The front of the school looked like it had died about 20 years ago, along with most of the students in it going by what they were wearing. Even the trees looked like they were suffering.

Hawkins wasn't California, that was for damn sure.

He didn't turn to Max as she skated off, long hair whipping in the wind as she rounded the corner, before with painful steps, he started walking inches closer to the school, the look and smell getting progressively worse being all he could think about before a rusty looking BMW screeched into the car park, pulling in next to his Camaro. He didn't catch sight of the driver, just the short curly haired passenger who opened his door with next to no care for his car. He was going to yell, he was, but the kid was already running off in the same direction Max had disappeared in earlier so he turned back, continuing his dreaded walk into the dreaded building, trying not to make an enemy of a 13 year old just yet.

His morning went as any other first day would, getting shown around the school by some over-enthusiastic nerd, getting thrown into a class where everyone stares at the new kid rather than listening to whatever bullshit the teacher doesn't want to be saying for the entire hour, and then have some overconfident girl come up and attempt to ask you out as if that was how this whole soulmate thing worked. He was used to it, he'd done it enough and this school was playing up to that routine perfectly, nothing was out of place.

But then he went to gym.

He walked in in just his shorts, shirt long forgotten in the changing rooms and was met with a whole class staring at him as he stared back at them all, glaring, putting fear into their bones. That part wasn't out of the ordinary. That always happened. But his entire

world slowly turning from monotone, boring, blacks, whites and greys to a portrait of lavish colour, of reds and greens and pinks that he'd only ever heard about in stories, of yellows and oranges and blues that apparently covered the morning sky, of whites and greys and blacks that were somehow more interesting than any he'd seen before. Of every colour he'd never seen and better versions of the ones he had.

That, that had never happened before.

But Billy didn't let it phase him, didn't for a moment let any sign of weakness flash across his face. He had to make an impression, had to assert his position in this school. No matter if the person he was destined to love forever was standing somewhere in front of him.

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Steve hadn't wanted this Monday to go in any way wrong. He just needed one day where everything felt normal, where no teacher asked him to retake a test, where no 'friend' came up and asked him how he was doing only with the intention of asking for something in return. One where Tommy just kept out of his face. He just needed one day where he could go to school and then go home without a single glitch. It hadn't been the best month.

But Steve wasn't that lucky. He was the kind of person who when told to 'drive safe', would run out of petrol 5 minutes later on the main road. Was the kind of person who would stay up all night studying for a test, only for it to be on the one chapter he hadn't read. Steve Harrington was the kind of person who would plan out the best evening of tv watching and takeaway eating, only for his parents to choose that one night to come home. So wanting an easy Monday was a bit of a far-fetched wish for him and he really should have known better, but it wasn't until the newest member of his gym class walked in that he realised how truly naive he had been.

And look, Steve wasn't one to freak out, he wasn't. But maybe he

could be excused for freezing a bit and *mildly* freaking out when all of a sudden his world was transformed into a million dimensions of colour he hadn't even known existed. It wasn't like he didn't know what it meant, or that he didn't know it could possibly happen. It was more that it was happening to *him*, in the middle of gym class, *because of a guy*. And that last part was definitely the reason he excused himself to the changing rooms to breathe in a rather rushed manner in front of the mirror, searching the entirety of his face as if expecting it to give him a solution, only finding that the face staring back at him was a face he'd never seen before. His hair, his eyes, the moles littering his skin all different shades of brown, no longer a darker grey than the previously lighter grey peachy hue now covering his body. His shirt was a different grey than any he'd seen before, almost bluer, greener. The walls were suddenly too bright, the sunlight reflecting off them and the orange hurting his eyes. His head hurt, his heart hammered in his chest, his lungs were failing to keep up.

Having his world burst into an explosion of colour was enough for him to take in on its own, of course he would have to deal with the fact that his soulmate was a guy on top of it all too.

He didn't know how long his little freakout lasted, but it was long enough for the teacher to send another kid in to find out where he'd gone. He splashed a bit of water on his face, took in a couple of deep breaths before, with slightly shaky legs, he made his way back into the gym. Back to his soulmate.

He never should have woken up hoping for an easy day.

Notes for the Chapter:

sooooo

basically this was supposed to be a short little one chaptered maybe 2k/3k words thing and well

it is currently a lot more than that hence why i've chaptered it, and why you will all be killing me when i post the final chapter (which i may or may not have already written, just not everything else in between lmao help me) and i cannot give you any certain time frame as to when i will be posting anything because i am an awful person

feel free to come and scream at me on [tumblr](#) if in the very likely event i forget i even wrote this because like i said, i am an awful person who has 5 other harringrove fics in the works and will probably only ever finish like 2 at most lmao actually end me (I won't actually forget about this but if i fail to post for like 2 weeks, please scream at me because i'll probably need it)

But for now, have this shit and enjoy lmao

(this is a short chapter don't worry friends, they get longer)

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve just watched, glanced every now and again when they were supposed to be reading. Studied the gentle glow of the boy's skin, colours that told hundreds of stories of a previous life. Stories Steve wanted to know, wanted to hear fall from the delicately pink lips curled currently around the end of a pen, slightly chapped, worn.

Notes for the Chapter:

Look at me posting the second chapter 3 days after the first and setting a standard i will probably fail miserably at keeping up with lmao

enjoy friends

The hour went slow. It always did, but today it seemed to go three times slower. Steve had tried his best to avoid eye contact with this 'Hargrove' as he'd heard people calling him. He hated that he already liked it, liked the way it sounded in his head. Hated that no matter how hard he tried to stop himself, his gaze would constantly travel and hook onto the toned, tanned muscles of his body, the dirty blonde of his shaggy hair, the glistening silver of the single earring hanging from his ear. Hated that he was so distracted by everything that made up this 'Hargrove' kid, the colours that were slowly brightening up his world, that he didn't notice him come hurdling straight for him, ball in hand.

He was on the floor in seconds, back aching from where it had smacked down flat on the ground, shoulders twinging with the force of the impact, elbows bruising from the weight of the fall. Billy's face was above his moments later, hand reaching out. Steve's hand met his almost on instinct, his body acting before his brain even had a chance to think about whether it was a good idea or not. And Billy's hand was warm, slotted in right where it was supposed to, almost as if it was made to be there. But it was his eyes that Steve couldn't look

away from, the glittering blue with so many stories, with so much pain and hurt and anger. So much grief, longing, rejection. His eyes that told a million stories and yet gave nothing away. His eyes made up of all the deepest blues of the sea, the darkest blues of a fear-inducing storm and the gentlest pale blues of the early morning sky. Steve was lost, was in wonder, was so mesmerized by all of the colours he was seeing in such a small area that he forgot he was lying on the floor. Forgot he was in a room full of people.

"You were moving your feet. Plant them next time, draw a charge." He almost whispered, almost as if the words were meant entirely for Steve, as if no one else was allowed to hear them. And it would have been kind in a weirdly constructive kind of way, had it not been for the harsh sneer and the aggressive leer in his voice and him pushing Steve back down onto the floor with more force than Steve could ever comprehend mustering up. He was walking away before Steve even got the chance to think about what had happened. Got the chance to consider whether Billy *knew* it was him. Knew that Steve had been thrust into a new world when he'd been least expecting it.

The coach's whistle pierced through the air, shrill, high, too loud for Steve's preoccupied mind. He got up, changed and was on his way to English before his mind had the chance to catch up, was sitting listening to the teacher ramble on about some book he'd failed to take interest in before he even realised he'd left the gym, was copying down notes into his notebook before he realised this Hargrove kid had somehow managed to end up in the previously unoccupied seat next to his.

He hadn't said anything, hadn't even acknowledged Steve. Or at least he thought he hadn't, his brain hadn't exactly kicked in until two seconds ago and they were already well over halfway into the lesson, it was entirely possible his soulmate could have said something, even if it was just a 'hi'. But he definitely wasn't saying anything now, just writing down more notes than were on the board, more notes than Steve felt was entirely necessary, and lightly joggling his knee under the table as if in thought, distracted.

Steve just watched, glanced every now and again when they were

supposed to be reading. Studied the gentle glow of the boy's skin, colours that told hundreds of stories of a previous life. Stories Steve wanted to know, wanted to hear fall from the delicately pink lips curled currently around the end of a pen, slightly chapped, worn.

The thought caused him to drop the book he was holding, the heavy fall to his desk turning a few heads, earning a look from the teacher, a loss of plastic from lips to his left. Deep pools of blue caught his eye, a subtle blush rising up the exposed skin on his neck, his heart beating a rhythm for two. He didn't say anything, just stared. Waited. Hoped something might come of it. But it didn't and Steve's eyes were suddenly locked onto long strands of dirty blond hair, no longer the vivacious blues he wanted so badly to explore. He didn't let it deflate him, he didn't. They'd only just met, this whole soulmate thing was bound to be a shock for the pair of them, there was no way they would just smile and get on straight away. That was if the guy even knew Steve was his soulmate in the first place.

Except that's all Steve had ever seen. On every tv show, in every book, people found their soulmates and were laughing 5 minutes later. He'd seen it with Mike and El for god's sake, the pair of them had been at ease in each others company from the second they'd met. Even Nancy and Jonatan, no matter how much that had stung, they just had this connection, knew what they were saying through a look alone, no words needed. And Steve wanted that. Wanted the ease, wanted the familiarity, the comfort. Yet here he was, not having even the faintest idea of what his soulmate was thinking, not knowing whether or not he should speak to him, strike up a conversation, get to know each other for god's sake and lowkey freaking the fuck out *because his soulmate was a fucking guy.*

He understood Nancy more than this guy when they, against all judgement, had dated for a couple of months. It wasn't an uncommon occurrence, there were a lot of people who dated others that weren't their soulmate because the chance of meeting one person in a sea of nearly 5 billion was low to say the least. Some went searching, some waited, others settled down. It was a matter of preference. And Steve and Nancy both knew they weren't destined to be together, that there was someone else out there for the both of them, but they still felt something, there was still a fondness between the two of them so

they went with it. And it was good for the few months it lasted, they were happy, but then Nancy locked eyes with Jonathan and well, he didn't blame her for leaving really. It was civil on both parts, and they were still friends. Steve may have loved her a bit, but if he was completely honest with himself, he was never *in* love with her. But he knew Jonathan was. He knew she was with him.

The bell went and Steve packed his stuff up and left. Didn't once turn back, didn't sneak a glance to his left. Just packed his books and made a beeline for the cafeteria, thankful for the distraction of lunch.

He sat opposite Nancy and Jonathan at their usual table, towards the back, next to the window. It was nice, a little way back from the intrusive chatter of the popular lot, the taunting comments and shady side glances from Tommy and Carol. It gave them the opportunity to blend in rather than stick out, but also hear the words they were each saying, not that Steve was doing much, if any, talking at all. In fact, he'd barely said a word past 'hi' since he'd slipped into the seat opposite, just listened to Nancy go on about some test she had tomorrow and how little time she had to sufficiently study, whilst Jonathan reassured her over and over that she would be absolutely fine, because she would. Because Nancy was incredibly intelligent and aced nearly every test she'd ever been given. She just didn't believe in herself and Steve put that partly down to a father who never praised her and teachers that always told her she could be better.

Steve looked up at the aching sensation of a foot colliding with his shin, only to see Jonathan looking at him intently, eyes screaming *'help me'* and Steve let out a chuckle. That wasn't his battle to fight anymore, not in the way it once was, but he was still her friend, he still wanted to be there for her, even if it was slightly different now.

"Nance, you'll do great. Come on, how many hours have you spent just this last week studying?"

"That's not the point here Steve."

"No, that's exactly the point. You gotta give yourself a break. It isn't good to study 8 hours a day."

"If only I had 8 hours.." Nancy trailed off.

"You'll be fine. You'll ace it." He said, a promise tugging at the ends of each syllable.

She gave him a small smile, one of her sweet little things that pulled at her lips and lifted her eyes and thanked him. It was quiet, it was small, it was lacking in confidence, but it was meant. Steve knew that.

"Anyway have you met the new kid? Billy I think his name is?"

Billy

Steve said it over and over in his head.

"Billy Hargrove."

It rolled off his tongue with next to no effort. Like Steve had said it a million times before.

"Yeah, that's him! What's he like? I've heard everyone say he's super hot." Nancy rattled off, earning a pout from Jonathan.

"Not that I would ever pick anyone over you, even if I had the choice." It was directed more at Jonathan, but Steve still heard every word and he had to stop listening. He didn't have a problem with them being together, he didn't, truly, it's just public displays of affection in any sense was not his thing and *god* were these two one of the cringiest, most lovestruck couples he ever had the misfortune of coming across. Well, not misfortune as such, they were his friends, he loved them both to pieces, it's just that when they were being like this, Steve really wished he could just get up and leave. Especially after the events of his morning.

When they'd finished their mollycoddling and actually seemed to remember Steve was sitting across from them, Nancy resumed her questioning.

"He's a bit of a dick, I guess," Steve said, absentmindedly rubbing his elbows from where they still ached from the weight of his fall, the sudden impact of hard ground.

"You guess?" She added.

"He knocked me over while we were playing basketball." Steve said, nonchalantly.

"On purpose?" Came Nancy's worry.

"No. Well, I don't think so. I'm not sure. He gave me some sort of advice before he shoved me back onto the floor."

"Like what?"

"He told me to plant my feet."

"After he knocked you down?" Jonathan piped up, Steve nodded.

"Weird." Nancy added. They agreed.

They ate their lunch in a comfortable silence, the odd comment here and there. It was nice, it helped pull Steve's mind from the constant foray of a certain new student's face filling his mind. It was a distraction. One Steve was incredibly thankful for.

The bell went and they each got up and went their separate ways, towards classrooms that would be the cause of their boredom for the next hour.

Steve didn't have another class with this Billy kid, *his soulmate*, for the rest of the day and he thought he was going to be free of him until at least tomorrow. Free to try and somehow get his head around all of this. But such as Steve's luck went, that was not the case at all. He walked out to his car at the end of the day, only to see the familiar back of a hair-filled head leaning up against the car next to his, cigarette hanging loosely from his lips. It was weird that the only constant, the only thing familiar in this whole new world was the sight of the guy that had caused it. He knew there was no way he was

getting into his car unnoticed, Billy was looking right towards it, towards the middle school that hundreds of kids were slowly filing out of. Steve's feet moved from the position they'd momentarily been stuck to, heading straight for a car he'd hardly recognised had it not been for the shape and the short curly haired boy standing next to it. Everything looked so different. His car was no longer just another grey car in a world full of grey cars. It had colour, it was a sort of rich mousey brown all over, occasional spots that had been in the sun too long a little lighter, ones that had been hit by debris a little darker. The framing around the windows had a gleam, was shining in the light. Even the damn tires seemed to be glowing. It was odd how the world Steve had known for his nearly 18 years of existence had just vanished, had been taken over by objects and people and a life he didn't recognise.

"There you are! God, take your time why don't you? Some of us have places to be."

"And where the hell do you have to be that's so damn important?"

"Er, the arcade? You know, that place in town that you promised you'd drop me at after school today?" Dustin sighed, hands floating in the air.

And Steve did remember, remembered promising at least. It wasn't like he'd chosen to forget, it was more that he'd found his soulmate, found out he was a *guy* for fuck's sake and Dustin's face and hair and clothes looked nothing like Steve remembered and his whole day had kind of thrown his life up in the air and yeah, he'd forgotten he was taking Dustin to the arcade. Fuck.

"Yeah, yeah. Get in." Dustin stuck his tongue out before ducking into the car.

Steve put his hand out to open his door when a voice from behind him made him freeze.

"Harrington, right?"

He'd forgotten Billy was there.

"That's me," Steve said, turning around to face the owner of the deep voice.

"That your brother?"

"Uh, something like that."

"Keep him away from her." He said, pointing behind him to a young girl about Dustin's age who had just slammed into what Steve assumed was Billy's car, having a silent argument with Dustin through a singular glare. Steve just glanced back at Billy, only to see him stomping out his cigarette and clambering into the car, speeding off before Steve even had the chance to respond.

"Dick." Steve muttered under his breath, getting into the car to sounds of Dustin's protests, *"seriously, have you got an allergy to moving fast today or something bloody hell,"* before driving off in the direction of town.

Steve dropped Dustin off, made sure he found all of the other little shits before walking across the street to the local small, family run diner. He ordered a coffee with far too much sugar, almost as pale as him and sat and just thought. Thought about Billy Hargrove, thought about the colours blinding him, thought about life and how everything had changed in the space of a momentary glance.

He overheard a conversation behind him, two girls from his year that he'd never learnt the names of, talking about Billy fucking Hargrove because apparently life hated him that much.

"He's so hot!"

"I know! I swear my heart skipped three beats when I saw him."

"Have you looked in his eyes yet?"

"No, have you?"

"No!"

"I bet he's my soulmate, I've never felt this way about someone!"

Steve audibly scoffed, listening to the pair of them argue about which one was going to be Billy's soulmate, sitting there knowing exactly who it was and that it was *not* one of them.

It was him.

God, it was *him*.

And he had no idea *how*.

Notes for the Chapter:

whelp so i'm at a loss as to why people are even reading this shit but i appreciate it a lot friends

i just apologise lmao

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

I literally cannot believe over 200 people have read this but thank you, i appreciate all of you

Two very much needed cups of coffee and an endless overheard discussion about the countless ways that Billy Hargrove was perfection on legs later, Steve walked back across the street to wait for Dustin to inevitably be late for his lift home.

He looked up at the bright yellow banner covering the expanse of the building, the sun reflecting off it, the brightness hurting his eyes that were still not used to the millions of colours filtering in. Glanced over at the orange writing floating on the white background of the sign out front, held his hand up when the sun got too much. Everything around him was different, it was literally like he'd been thrown into a whole new world and he was still undecided as to whether he wanted it or not. Sure, it was pretty, it was stunning in fact, much more vibrant than the world he was living in before. But he *knew* that world, knew how everything was supposed to be, knew who *he* was supposed to be. Standing here, staring at buildings and cars and people he didn't recognise, he felt lost. Felt like the life he'd been living for near enough 18 years had been ripped away from right in front of him and replaced with another that looked amazing, but came with one major consequence. He was going to fall in love with someone he would never have dreamt of falling in love with.

The sound of tires screeching on tarmac pulled Steve from his thoughts, glancing over his shoulder to see a very blue, very recognisable Camaro pull in next to his car, being driven by the one person on this planet Steve very much did not want to see right now.

He didn't look at him, faced his eyes directly at the door of the arcade, trying to avoid any type of conversation with the guy.

"You stare at that door any longer and someone's going to get the wrong idea." Came the recognisable voice from behind him.

"What?" He asked, confused because seriously, *what?*

"You, staring at that door that leads to a room full of kids. Just saying that someone might get the wrong idea is all."

And honestly, trust Steve to end up making a conversation point out of *not* looking at the guy.

"Whatever." He shrugged off, turning to look at his feet instead.

"You got a problem with me, Harrington?" Billy asked, getting out of his car, obviously not favouring the through the window approach to conversation anymore.

"You shoved me over in basketball. Twice." He said, incredulous, looking at Billy in a way that screamed obviousness.

"A little rough play never hurt a guy that bad." He said, nonchalant, lighting up a cigarette.

"That's not really the point here."

"No?" Billy asked, goading Steve on.

"No."

"Then what is, pretty boy?"

Steve just stared at him, brushing the nickname off.

"You always start a new school like this?"

"What makes you think I've got anything to compare it to?" Billy scoffed, offended.

"Your attitude for one. Also the fact that Dustin told me this is the third school your sister's been at in the last two years."

"That the little shit I told you to keep away from Max?"

"Yeah, about that, I'm not going to control his or her friends and neither should you."

"You don't get to decide what I do."

"When it comes to Dustin or any of the other kids, I do."

Billy stood up straight, no longer leaning against his car, dropped his cigarette to the floor, grinding it into the ground, fists clenched at his side. He half admired Steve for standing up to him, but ultimately knew that it was not going to end well for him.

Steve had turned around, leaning against his own car in the opposite direction of Billy until the sound of gravel underfoot caught his attention.

"See, I don't think you get to make that choice," Billy said, almost growled at Steve as he turned around.

"Yeah? Who says you do?"

"Got quite the mouth on you, haven't ya princess." He stated, getting gradually closer with each breath.

Steve could see his fists flexing, could hear his breath quickening, could see the fire raging behind his eyes. He knew Billy wanted a fight, he knew he didn't want to give him one, but he also knew he didn't want to back down.

"I know I'm late and I'm sorry but you see Max here beat my score and I *had* to beat her Steve, I had to!" Dustin called out as he ran from the arcade to Steve's car, unaware of the tension between the two almost adults right in front of him.

Steve turned away from Billy at the sound of four other pairs of feet running towards them.

"Yeah yeah, don't act like I didn't tell your mother we'd be home half an hour later than I told you."

Dustin looked up at him, offence written across the expanse of his features.

"I don't know whether to hate you or be proud of you for actually using your brain." He said incredulously, blank expression on his

face.

"Shut up and get in the damn car," he said towards Dustin before turning and calling out to Will, Lucas and Mike to get in too.

"I thought Jonathan was getting us today?" Will asked, quiet and calm.

"You and me both kid," Steve replied because yeah, Jonathan was supposed to be picking them up, but Nancy had roped him into last minute revision and Steve couldn't say he was even the least bit surprised.

He'd almost forgotten Billy was standing behind him, their little standoff having been interrupted.

"Max will you hurry the fuck up?" Billy yelled, drawing Steve's attention back to him.

Max ran from where she'd been huddled in the group, straight into Billy's car, slamming the door behind her, a look of fear masked strongly by the anger she held towards her brother. Steve could understand that.

He watched as Billy followed suit and the Camaro pulled out of the car park at much too high of a speed, before getting into his own car filled with 13 year olds.

"You think he's always like that?" Lucas asked from the back, concern dripping off each syllable.

"I find it hard to imagine him nice," Steve muttered before pulling off and heading in the direction of the Byers'.

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"Thought I told you to stay away from those shits Max," Billy stated, voice raising towards the end of the sentence.

"You can't tell me who I can and can't be friends with, Billy." She replied, sharp, biting.

"I think you'll find that I just did." He growled back, hands gripping tighter on the wheel.

Max just stared out of the window, silent, knowing she was fighting a losing battle.

Billy slammed the car into park as soon as they reached the house and they both briskly walked to the front door and then their own bedrooms, no words exchanged between the two, neither saying hello to Susan or Neil, Billy knowing it would only come back to bite him later.

He slammed his door shut, various objects on shelves and cabinets rattling around as he flung himself onto his bed. He closed his eyes and let himself breathe for the first time since he'd walked into that school this morning. For the first time since his whole world had been turned upside down in gym.

Everything was so different. So bright. Just everything and nothing he was used to all at once and it was giving him a headache.

He rubbed his hands over his face, over his eyes, amazed at the tiny little dots of colour now having made their way behind his eyelids. It was everywhere, this colour, on every single thing that ever existed and it was blinding. It was enough to take in on its own without the whole having someone you're destined to be with forever being somewhere close to you thing. And then not knowing *who* that person was on top of it all, it was just a lot to take in was all. A lot of information that Billy really didn't want to be focusing on the day after he moved to a whole new damn town for god's sake.

He gripped the necklace hanging around his neck and closed his eyes again, wishing his mum was still here. Wishing she was still here so she could teach him the difference between the blues and the reds and the yellows. Could teach him what the colour of his hair was, the shade of his car, how to go about finding which of the guys from his

gym class was the one he was supposed to fall in love with. He wished she was around so that he'd have someone to talk to about all of this, about the colours, about falling in love, about falling in love with a *guy*. He just wished she was still here because he missed her. He missed her so damn much.

A single tear rolled down his cheek as he clutched his necklace, the final gift she'd given him before she'd died. He didn't know how to figure it all out, it wasn't like he had a book on what all of the colours meant. He knew they existed, there were thousands of them out there about each colour, its name, its shade, what to do when you meet your soulmate, *how* to find them. But it wasn't like he could just march on down to the library and borrow one, or buy one from the local store because someone would see him, there was bound to be someone, even the person serving him, who would let the cat out of the bag. Soulmates were a big deal in people's lives so if someone found out you'd found yours, *everyone* else found out too.

He let himself have a moment because quite frankly, he deserved it. But then Susan's voice was outside his door, telling him dinner was ready and Billy knew better than to be late or to, god forbid, miss dinner. So he scrubbed at his face, made sure no trace of tears were anywhere to be seen and headed out to eat whatever subpar meal it was that Susan had cooked.

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Steve dropped Dustin off last and then drove back to his house, quiet, no hum of a radio, no chirp of the birds. He pulled into the drive, turned the engine off and just sat. Didn't move a muscle. Hardly breathed. His mind was filled with so many different thoughts all at once it was almost as if it was filled with nothing at all. So many thoughts moving so fast that he couldn't catch a single one. Thoughts about soulmates, about colours he still didn't understand, about Billy Hargrove. His apparent future boyfriend. *Fuck*, it was such a weird

concept. This guy he'd only met this morning, this guy that he didn't know at all outside of a few snide remarks, was the person he was apparently going to devote the rest of his life to. He hated it. Hated that the universe got to map out his future for him. He'd experienced enough of it from his dad, *"You will work for my company, Steven."*, *"You will pass these exams and qualify for this job."*, *"You will dedicate your future to ensuring the survival of this business."* It pissed him off. He knew he didn't want to work for his father's boring, money-grabbing business but he didn't seem to have a choice. His future career and now love life had all seemingly been written out for him in a time before he even existed and now he was just living this illusion of freedom as if he had a damn choice about anything. It pissed him off. A lot.

A slight wind chill brought Steve out of his thoughts, the cold air having seeped into the car from it being still for so long. He gathered himself, got out and walked into his house. His big, empty, quiet house. Parents still away at whatever business event it was that his dad had been called to this time. Or maybe just away, he wasn't sure, they never told him. Some days he just woke up to a note telling him they would be gone for a week or so, even though it was always more than that. It had been frustrating, used to annoy him a lot, now he was just used to it, had been since he was about 5 and started seeing the nannies more than his own parents. He hardly even saw them when they were at home, his father always in his study, his mum bumbling around in the kitchen. The only thing that frustrated him about the whole situation anymore was that he never knew *when* they were coming home. He could always be sure for the first week, maybe the second, but from then on it was just a guessing game and almost guaranteed that they'd be home the *one* night Steve had made plans.

He resented them for it, hated that they left a 5 year old kid to wonder why his parents didn't love him enough to say hello. He'd realised as he'd grown older that his existence was purely down to the fact that his father needed to pass the business onto someone, so like his father before him, he was going to pass it onto his son. But Steve still hated them, hated the situation. Sure, they'd set him up with enough money for a lifetime, but he'd have much rather had dinner with them at least once a week than have everything he

needed, and didn't, paid for. He would have taken the loving family over the money any day.

He placed his shoes neatly by the door, hanging his coat on its hook before making his way upstairs. He pushed open his bedroom door, going straight towards the bookshelf on the opposite wall. There were books in front of books, shelves filled to the edge with texts about business, about plants, cars and everything else in between. His parents hadn't held back on that front. There was a pile of school books at the front, ones he'd studied in English over the years and behind them, behind the books on anatomy and the latest tech gadgets, behind every book he'd read and the ones he would never go near, sat one book that Steve never thought he would need. A book his mother had slipped in when he was 4 and had started asking questions. It was one thing she'd done that he was actually thankful for. He knew that if she weren't so dedicated to his father, to keeping him happy, that they'd have a much different relationship, might even get on. They had up until the nannies came.

He stared at the book in his hand, *'Colours - what they mean and how to find your soulmate'*. He had no idea if it would be any good, but it was a start at least.

The pages were all filled with thousands of different shades of reds and greens and blues. The different variants of each, the names under squares of colour. He'd had a basic understanding, knew the sky was blue, the grass was green, the sun was yellow. He'd picked it up over the years from books, from people around him. He remembered asking Nancy what the colour of his hair was when she'd first met Jonathan, he remembered her saying brown. But he was looking through the book now, seeing a page dedicated to the shades of 'pink' which he'd heard Nancy mention before, another about 'orange' which he recognised from the changing room walls and the sign at the arcade, the next on 'purple' which he could see on the walls just outside of his room. Page after page of a million different colours, different shades and varieties, thousands of versions of one single colour. It was so much to take in, so crazy to think that there was so much more to the world he'd known than just the monotone look of it all. He didn't know if he was ever going to quite get used to it.

The rest of the book was almost of no use to him, seen as he already

knew who his soulmate was. He needed another one on '*what the fuck to do when you find out your soulmate is the same gender as you*', but he doubted one of those existed. Doubtful one would have been allowed to be published. No one could choose their soulmate, but that didn't stop some people from choosing if you were allowed to be together or not. It was stupid. Stupid that some people still wouldn't accept it even though it wasn't a decision. Steve hadn't ever cared about it, granted he hadn't exactly been privy to it much out in the back and beyond town of Hawkins, but he still accepted it. He guessed he could thank his parents for that, for them not being around much so that he could make his own decisions on how he saw the world that was, he knew his dad especially was not so easily accepting and wherever he went, his mother followed, so he could take one easy guess as to where she stood on the matter.

He turned the book back to the beginning and read it again, and then again and again. He kept reading it, kept studying it until he knew the names of the colours, until he knew the shades and the variations without even having to think. He studied it harder than he'd studied for any test. Because he needed to know, needed to understand the world he was now living in. A world that wasn't hard for someone who only saw in black and white, but was surprisingly more suited to those that saw in colour, even if thousands still didn't, some never would. It was stupid, the whole damn thing was stupid. But all Steve could do was make the most out of a mediocre situation. Make the most of being almost forced to fall in love with someone.

He went downstairs to grab some dinner, his stomach making itself known. He had to stop and collect himself for a second because even the food he was cooking with was a bloody rainbow of colours. And his meal wasn't anything amazing, something less than satisfactory really because his mind was so preoccupied with everything that had happened, making pasta taste anything more than adequate was far from his list of things to do. He barely paid attention to eating it, or clearing everything away. It had looked colourful though, he'd noticed that.

He dragged himself upstairs, walked to his window to face the starry night sky which somehow looked more vibrant, a million times better

than it ever had before. He crawled into bed, turning onto his side before shutting his eyes, not once wishing for tomorrow to be better because he'd woken up hoping for an easy Monday, and look where the fuck that had got him.

Notes for the Chapter:

lowkey got a lil bitter at the world towards the end
there lol sorry